THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

VOL. VI, No. 9 UNION COLLEGE : SCHENECTADY, N. Y. DECEMBER, 1944

JAN 6 - 1945

Visual Instruction In English?

In view of the rapid developments in visual aids for many subjects, I should like to ask the CEA membership a question which I feel may be of significance in the future conduct of our teaching: How much are we interested in developing and using visual methods in college English teaching? I say "developing" because at present we have almost no material at all on the college level. We shall not very soon get much of it unless we ask for it with some vigor, since the agencies which can best produce it must of necessity undertake to supply a fairly large demand or else lose money. It is true that we may, with considerable time and effort, produce some of it for ourselves; and we may have to do so to prove that we really want it. I have done so myself on a small scale, and I know of others who have; but the job can be handled more skillfully by professional agencies, always with the close consultation of teachers.

There seems already to be a desire for more and better pictorial material. Textbook makers are increasingly acknowledging the value of graphic materials by putting many "background" pictures into literature texts. But there are drastic limitations set by both cost and bulk in such a procedure. One or two film strips, for example, can contain more pictures than a whole two-volume anthology; and excellent film strips could readily be made available for the study of any author, period, specific selection, or phase of work in composition. This is not to say that pictures in texts are not useful; rather, the interest which these comparatively few pictures may stimulate should be more fully exploited by supplementary visual aids.

Where will impetus in the use of visual aids come from? For one thing, teachers returning from the Army and Navy training programs will, I believe, be strongly in favor of using some kind of visual method—the sound film, the silent film, the film strip, or soon, it may be, television. There is abundant testimony that such methods do work in many fields, and work well. As a result, the whole field of visual instruction is due for great expansion; and it might be well if we were to register our desires for a part in that expansion, if we feel that visual methods can be of service to us.

Of all the immediately possible visual devices, I believe that the simple film strip is the most generally feasible. It is easily produced, is cheap in price, and requires only an inexpensive, portable, and easily operated projector. A highly satisfactory projector and screen may at present be purchased for less than one hundred dollars; and the government may soon release to schools vast stores of such apparatus through surplus property disposal. Film strips can be made quite entertaining, but at the same time they are fundamentally an instructional device, enabling students and teachers not only to view but also to discuss material as it is being shown. I would suggest possible uses, in addition to many applications in literature, in these branches of our subject: composition (the library, the long paper, the outline, theme correction, diagramming, aids to the teaching of technical writing, miscellaneous matters of form); linguistics, especially phonetic script; dictionary and vocabulary study; bibliography and textual criticism. Other teachers may know of still further possibilities.

Therefore I repeat my question, which I hope will bring replies expresing many other points of view: Are we now ready to develop and use visual methods in college English; and if so, to what extent and in what forms?

Joseph Jones,
The University of Texas.

A "Tool" Subject?

I am tired of being told by educators that English is a "tool subject"! Some of my colleagues discussing curricula, nod gravely and pronounce, "of course, English: it is a necessary tool subject. Without a sufficient knowledge of it our work—"etc. By this benevolent concession English is admitted as a humble house servant to the academic family upstairs. And from time to time its domestic training is criticized on the basis of its success in carrying dishes to their table. Literature? Oh yes, of course a student must know how to read intelligently, "otherwise in our work——".

Now I have no prejudice against tools. The hammer and saw—and even the smoothing plane — are essential, but their significance is in what they build. And also in a sense all subjects are tool subjects —like mathematics and physics, or foreign languages, or economics. But since I have spent half a century in studying English or in teaching it, I hate to think that its main significance lies in its assistance to other subjects. I still cling to the idea that first directed me into this field: that in the writing of English is to be found development of accuracy, of discrimination, and of taste—surely important elements in personality; and that in literature may be found the crowning records of the human mind.

It is easier to convince administrative officers of the first proposition than the second—or at least to gain a seeming assent, for obviously it matters little to the tool argument whether accuracy is an end or a means. But literature is another matter. Of course administrative officers do not openly decry as respectable a subject as English literature, but their concern with it is apparently quite moderate. It is often a field for easy retrenchment.

Yet it was not a man whose special field was literature, but a scientist, Huxley, who asserted that there is in English literature alone the material for a liberal education. And why not? What after all is literature but the lasting record of the human mind of each age? To attain the impossible task of completely assimilating it would require not only a comprehension of all the material influences of a time, but the sensing of that much more elusive element, the spirit of the age.

Why might not a college executive, looking for an "objective" of liberal education, set as its aim the comprehension and appreciation of the literature of the English tongue? For this end, history, economics, government, science, philosophy, and psychology would be tool subjects indeed. And the degree to which a student progressed toward this distant goal would be a pretty good measure of his intellectual development, while his gleanings on the way might well prove as practical contributes to the art of living as any marketable course in an up to the minute list.

W. E. Aiken,
University of Vermont

A Writing Project

Dear Editor:

One of the most valuable writing projects ever undertaken by one of my classes in Freshman English grew very unexpectedly out of a dictionary-study assignment.

To begin with, the members of the class discovered that although they had had an acquaintance with dictionaries from their grammar school days they actually knew very little about them, either as to their effective use or as to the variety of information contained in them. As a result, the class decided that they needed to do something to remove their deficiency. From this decision grew the dictionary-study assignment.

Each student was to make a careful study of her dictionary and then construct a three-level outline for a theme on a subject such as "What Can Be Learned from a Dictionary". In addition she was to write one paragraph of that theme, choosing any section of her outline that interested her.

The class discussion that grew out of questions about the assignment led to an observation by one of the students that it would be interesting to fit the various paragraphs together into a composite

(Continued on Page 3)

Cardinal Newman And the Liberal Arts

The September NEWS LETTER'S many articles calling for more emphasis on the liberal arts in American colleges interested me tremendously. What a great thing it is to know that educators all over the country are at last awake to the problem and are striving unitedly to do something about it! Here's one more teacher who is hoping most strongly and sincerely that American colleges will make a virtue out of necessity and use the post-war reorganization as a heaven-sent opportunity to put the liberal arts back in their proper place in the university, before scientific specialization does them to death.

Some good comes even from war; and certainly one of the best results of this one is the rude awakening of our new veterans to the fact that education's aim must be the forming of a complete man, not of a soulless robot who is very much at home in a laboratory or behind a machine but hopelessly bewildered when confronted with the real values of life. Education wants no more Frankensteins.

At last some of the great Victorians will receive willing listeners. It's strange how contemporary their words on education sound. Thumbing through the pages of the great Cardinal Newman, in which he does stout battle for the liberal arts, I found a passage in THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY that hits our own nail right on the head.

> This then is how I should solve the fallacy, for so I must call it, by which Locke and his disciples would frighten us from cultivating the intellect, under the notion that no education is useful which does not teach us some temporal calling, or some mechanical art, or some physical secret. I say that a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number. There is a duty we owe to human society as such, to the state in which we belong, to the sphere in which we move, to the individuals towards whom we are variously related, and whom we successively encounter in life; and that philosophical or liberal education, as I have called it, which is the proper function of a University, if it refuses the foremost place to professional interests, does but postpone them to the formation of the citizen. . . .
>
> Clinton Albertson, S. J.,
> Loyola University of Los Angeles.

THE NEWS LETTER

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BURGES JOHNSON

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Editorial

It will be a hard job for the people of this nation to arrive at a satisfactory answer to the question of universal military training for our young men.

Much of the debate will be futile because arguments will not meet head on. Every other word has to be defined to the satisfaction of an overwhelming majority. "Universal", for instance: does that mean young people of both sexes? Many will ask why young women should not profit by government expenditure for training of our young people. The Wacs and the Waves and the Spars have done much to break down any sex definition of a government trainee.

Then what is meant by the word "military" and the word "training"? If it is not to be purely military in character, what then is intended? Marching and countermarching and dumb-bell drill? Some of these questions seem silly, but far sillier things will be asked and many silly arguments advanced before the debate is ended.

The first questions for the public to solve are these: Just what do we want to accomplish; and why? We shall probably continue our ancient and sensible policy of maintaining a small standing army of professional officers and soldiers, so organized that it will serve as a skeleton for the army of citizen forces which would be drafted in emergency; but we want those young citizens to be in better shape physically and mentally if ever the need again arises.

But we believe that those who want universal military training are still in the minority. They must be willing to compromise, and merge their forces with those who want a training of our young with the emphasis upon physical fitness, alert-mindedness, aroused intelligence and obedience. They put these things into one word and call it "discipline." They have been shocked and actually frightened by the high percentage of our young people who have been found unfit mentally or physically by the draft boards throughout the nation. They believe that something should be done about it; and part of their shock is due to the discovery that our much vaunted public education system has been found wanting. The education it has provided has been woefully scant in many spots. These citizens emphasize the word discipline. They want the government to take every young man in hand for one year, check to see that he is literate, and if not, make him so; then train him to keep himself clean and well, to stand up straight and to obey orders.

But "discipline" is a word with many interpretations; and what most of us seem to want in the way of discipline for the vast army of our youth is something that will not be supplied by a brief period of universal training, unless the youngsters themselves are conscious of the need for it. The discipline which thousands upon thousands of our young men have lacked is something that the home and the community as well as the schools have failed to provide.

It is possible that Congress should lay out a program first for the universal discipline of American parents, before it attempts universal training for the young. Home discipline is something that one home alone cannot provide. Teen-aged youngsters cannot be gotten off the streets by one household if all the other youngsters in the block are still outdoors; any more than one ten-year-old can be kept away from uncensored motion pictures if all the other ten-year-olds are going. Even if one community wakes up to home responsibility for the discipline of children and a community ten miles away has not waked up, the level of training in both communities will be kept down. That is the price we pay for easy communication. Easy communications corrupt good manners. If government does have to step in, we might well get ready to tell Congress just how we feel about it.

A Literary Coincidence?

As a matter of passing interest, the following may be instanced for implications of possible literary coincidence:

Louis Untermeyer, in **From Another World** (N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939; p. 205): "The appraiser . . . should remember the formula of George Bernard Shaw as summarized by Mencken: to put the obvious in terms of the scandalous."

Bernard Muddiman (speaking of Shaw's work in general), in **The Men of the Nineties** (N. Y.; Putnam, 1921; p. 42): ". . . full . . . of the obvious in the terms of the scandalous."

George Brandon Saul,
University of Connecticut

Note to Members

Your Secretary-Editor is seeking rest and renewed health in the southwest, and make no other apology for this delayed issue. He will lecture his way home again at the end of February through Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Cleveland, and points east. In the meantime please send MSS in quantity to him in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Nominating Comm. report in January issue.

Dear Editor:

I am a little more than annoyed by your publication of stupid sentences purportedly written by the wives and mothers of servicemen. In the first place, I question the good taste of poking fun at people who may have great reason for being in distress. In the second place, the sentences convict the writers only of the fault of not being clever (which fault is often a virtue). In the third place, the sentences very probably are not authentic, though they are printed as such and the Editor remarks, "And these people all have the vote."

I suspect that the sentences, or most of them, belong in standard American humor and that they are now being passed around under a new heading. A decade ago some of them were shown to me by a relief worker. Later some of them appeared on a mimeographed sheet and were attributed to relatives of workers on leaf-raking WPA. In the **Saturday Evening Post** for March 20, 1937, one of them is printed verbatim and two others are printed with only slight variations. I have the impression that some of them appeared even in the **Reader's Digest**—which to me is sure proof of their ancient vintage.

Whether or not the writers of the sentences have the vote is largely an academic matter. By now the writers have children, possibly grandchildren, who conceivably are better educated.

H. B. Knoll,
Purdue University.

Dear Editor:

The sentences "taken from letters received in the office of a Washington Bureau, from mothers and wives of men in the service" and appearing in the November issue were very amusing but, in part at least, misleading. Six of them date from World War I!

Wanting to share my amusement over them, I read them to an elderly woman of my acquaintance. She laughed heartily and said she had something similar to them which she had saved from World War I. She went to a desk, dug out a faded paper from the drawer and handed it to me. It was a copy of a single letter (whether real or phony she didn't know) in which was found nearly half of the humorous sentences which you printed.

Perhaps we are in the presence of a piece of incipient folk literature.

Louis Hasley,
University of Notre Dame.

Dear Editor:

I have been meaning to drop you a line for some time, especially concerning the verse on the Wise Old Owl with its hypnotic line "Quietly do the next thing next." I have been wanting to tell you that so far as I am concerned it is the most helpful piece of verse that has come out of the war!

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A WRITING PROJECT

(Continued from Page 1)

theme, which could be used to advantage by the entire class. The suggestion was accepted with enthusiastic approval by the group, and it brought out some questions and problems which before then had had no reality for the students; Suppose we don't all use the same point of view? How can we make the paragraphs fit together? How will we tie one paragraph to the next one? Suppose we all choose to write on the same topic?

Obviously, some of those problems had to be settled there and then. The question of divisions of topics was solved by having the class work out together the main headings of the outline and the approximate paragraph divisions, the more detailed outline to be completed as assigned. Then each student chose the material she preferred. It was a small class, and the material, including a paragraph of introduction and one of conclusion, came out evenly. However, I have since used the project successfully with a larger group, where two or even three students collaborated in writing one paragraph. Next, the problem of a unified approach to the material had to be handled. It was plain that if one student wrote in the first person, another in the second, and a third from the impersonal angle the results would not fit together with any degree of unity. So we decided it would be necessary to choose one point of view for the whole group before the paragraphs were written; and we did. We choose the personal angle: What I Can Learn from My Dictionary.

At the next class hour, when the paragraphs came in, the question of fitting them together and making transitions was tackled. Each student read the paragraphs which preceded and followed hers, and then, working together, the students smoothed the passage of thought from topic to topic and offered each other valuable criticism and advice about the individual paragraphs.

The completed paragraphs were read aloud to the class in their proper sequence, and suggestions for improvement were made by the group and carried out by the individual students. The finished paper was typed with enough carbons so that each member of the class had a copy.

The result far surpassed my expectations. In addition to learning a great deal about the dictionary and its use, each student had seen a practical need for maintaining one point of view throughout a piece of writing and for making smooth transitions from paragraph to paragraph; and the class had profited as a whole by working together on a piece of composition for which each one could see a definite need.

Lou Whitfield Miller,
Florida State College
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The Conference At Hutchinson

The Teachers Association and Board of Education of Hutchinson, Kansas, turned to the colleges for aid in a worth-while program carried through at that city on October 20 and 21. The conference was attended by about one hundred out-of-town teachers and administrators; these with approximately two hundred seventy-five local teachers made a good-sized gathering.

The program had a single theme —"Communication for Education in Democracy"—which gave unity of purpose to all that was done. At the opening meeting Mr. Harold A. Anderson of the University of Chicago emphasized the importance of speaking, listening, reading, and writing for language communication and pointed out that it was the function of English instruction to teach all four of these modes of communication.

Students should be trained in group discusion and in parliamentary debate, for democracy presupposes the functioning of small groups of people, working out together their common destiny. Language facility for everyone should be the goal of the teacher of English.

Of great importance in our day are the newspapers, the periodicals, the radio, and the motion pictures. Some 47 million newspapers were printed daily in the United States in 1943; in 9/10 of the homes of our country the radio is going five hours a day; the average weekly attendance at movies is about 80 million. Instruction in the best use of these media would be valuable.

Dr. Lennox Gray of Teachers College, Columbia University, talked on "General Reading and Literary Reading: Do They Call for Different Skills?" Reading is a matter of recognizing and interpreting signs and symbols. Good literature contains the right amount and depth of emotion to recreate the original, whereas good science is devoid of emotion.

Mrs. Luella B. Cock of Minneapolis spoke on the topic "He Who Would Find Himself Must Lose Himself — An approach to the teaching of composition." Mrs. Cook urged that writing be made objective. She thought that too much had been said about self-expression.

Dr. Lennox Gray spoke again at the Friday evening meeting, on "The Communication Arts and the School Community." Our function as teachers is to improve communication. We should teach English as a communication art. War has brought communication needs to our attention; it has restored community efforts.

The final session, on Saturday morning, consisted of a panel discussion "Communication for Social Living" followed by a summary of the conference by Mr. Anderson.

Such conferences have value. The stimulation given by new ideas and new methods of approach is bound to be reflected in enriched classroom presentation.

Walter Pennington
K.S.T.C. Pittsburgh, Kansas

Preliminary Announcement

The Reading Clinic Staff of the School of Education, The Pennsylvania State College, State College, Pennsylvania, is sponsoring two important meetings on readings on problems during 1945.

Seminar on Reading Disabilities, January 29 to February 2, 1945.

Conference on Reading Instruction, June 26 to June 29, 1945.

The Annual Seminar on Reading Disabilities will be held from January 29 to February 2, 1945. Demonstrations and discussions on a differentiated program for analyzing and typing, or classifying, reading disabilities will be conducted by the Staff of the Reading Analysis Unit of the Reading Clinic.

From June 26 to June 29, 1945, the Reading Clinic Staff will conduct the Annual Conference on Reading Instruction. This Conference deals with classroom problems.

Copies of the program and information on transportation schedules may be obtained from Miss Betty J. Haugh, Reading Clinic Secretary. Those desiring college credit, especially Graduate School credit, for the seminar should register in advance with the Director of the Reading Clinic.

Emmett A. Betts,
Penn. State College.

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Periodical Gleanings

An imagination truly Celtic presents to this most practical of continents "Nature Spirits in North America," in **Tomorrow** for Sept. Subjective mind, continues Arthur Farwell, a few pages later on, in "Hitler's Intuitions," gives the right answer to any question sincerely propounded; but its powers cannot safely be invoked by a Hitler, or a Macbeth. In "Re-reading the Philosophers" Padraic Colum notes Augustine's concern with memory and time, Schopenhauer's modern theory of the unconscious, and Kierkegaard's stress on the individual, who must live in tension.

Man is an insurgent, says Chauncey Brewster Tinker in the Autumn **Yale Review**; demoted, age after age, from a supreme position, he always finds new cause for splendid dreams. He must dream now to some purpose, warn the editors of **The Free World** (Oct.), for "the human race must now prove itself the full master of its environment, or prepare for the annihilation Nature has always accorded the unfit." Oliver N. Reiser then suggests "Building the World Brain." and C. H. Waddington advises "Faith and Reason in Double Harness." On this crisis "A Soldier Looks at the Church," only to find it remote from the lives of men (**Harper's**, Oct.).

An excellent thumb-nail view of the contemporary scene is afforded by the Oct. 6 issue of **The United States News**, not only in its customary 2-page summary of the outlook for the immediate future, but in four noteworthy articles.

"Is Hitler Youth Curable?" No, answers Heinrich Fraenkel (**New Rep.**, Sept. 18); ingrained bruitality can not be eradicated. But the Nazi elements in Argentina might yet be checked by economic sanctions that would bring democratic leadership to the fore (**Free World**, Sept.). His "Russian Visit" leaves Eric Johnston optimistic (**Life**, Sept. 11), and "Liberation Will Find the Greeks Are Ready" (**Life**, Sept. 4, which has also a pictorial summary of "The Revolutionary History of Paris.")

Despite short-sighted American policies (**Yale Review**), "The Filipinos Are Ready," and are fiercely resentful towards their Japanese overlords (Marc T. Greene, in **Asia**, for Sept.). The misery of the Puerto Ricans under American rule, and the fact that Latin America is watching our colonial policy, should impel us to grant self-government to these people, thinks Oswald Garrison Villard (**Asia**, Sept.). But the sorest spot in American democracy is that ably diagnosed in Gunnar Myrdal's monumental study, condensed to 32 pages in Public Affairs Pamphlet 95, "The Negro in America." That comradeship between black and white is feasible is shown in "S.S. Booker T. Washington" (**New Rep.**, Oct. 2) and "The Englishman Meets the Negro" (**Common Ground**, Aut.; also "I Thank You for This," by Langston Hughes, and "The Faint Dawn Quickens").

England too has her perplexities. The problem of the Jew in "The Much Promised Land" (**Fortune**, Oct.) offers no safe solution, except perhaps a Jordan Valley authority and judicious bargaining with the Arabs. Alone, among the other 8 millions displaced by the Nazis, the Jews are not considered in current plans (Lewis S. Gannett, **Nation**, Sept. 9). William Saroyan, however, finds England "All That I Dreamed It to Be" (**Britain**, Sept.), and Demaree Bess says that "The British Empire Feels Its Oats," secure in the historic role of fostering the liberties of smaller European states (**Britain Today**, Sept), and in the present organization for full post-war employment (Ernest Bevin in **Vital Speeches**, Sept. 1). Joseph M. Jones writes on Britain's new subsidation of colonies (**Fortune**, Oct.), speculating on whether or not the United States will be willing to play ball, with new international regional commissions.

Both Walter Lippmann (**Reader's Digest**, Sept.) and Clark E. Eichelberger (**Survey Graphic**, Sept.) urge America to strengthen and keep intact the international frame-work already fabricated, and the first Senate debate on the International Security League is chronicled in the **U. S. News** (Sept. 5). What is perhaps the outstanding social achievement of the Roosevelt Administration (Stuart Chase, "What the TVA Means", **Reader's Digest**, Oct.) has led to Senator Murray's new bill for the control of the droughts and floods of the Missouri Valley (**New Rep.**, Sept. 14; **Survey Graphic**, Oct.). The Senator himself suggests "World TVA's—New Frontiers for Peace" (**Free World**, Oct.) Co-operatives as training grounds for democracy are lauded by Paul Green (**New Rep.**, Sept. 6) and H. M. Kallen (**SRL**, Sept. 9). Private enterprise, the cornerstone of American advance, is enthusiastically commended by William B. Burton, influential in the C.E.D., an association of 50,000 business men (**Fortune**, Oct.)

"Education Discovers Organized Labor," exults Mark Starr (**Cur. Hist.**, Oct.). New schools of labor and industry, new courses, are being instituted, as those at Harvard and Cornell. Education may indeed be revolutionized after the war, thinks **Science News Letter** (Sept. 16), with the emphasis placed on study of regional areas, and the textbooks almost encyclopedias of the contemporary world. The Saturday Review of the same date is devoted to Education. Six stirring articles affirm again the modern educational credo, and the reader chuckles over Jacques Barzun's "Are Teachers Escapists?" As a valuable subject, thinks Theodore M. Greene (**Yale Rev.**) history stands high, for it combines the all-over view of philosophy with the concrete data of the arts. Surprisingly, one history text remains a best-seller ("On Rereading Gibbon," **Atlantic**, Oct.). The English teachers, unfortunately, are paid to neglect this very essential subject: ("Renegotiate the English Teachers," **Harper's**, Oct.)

A. V. HALL,
University of Washington.

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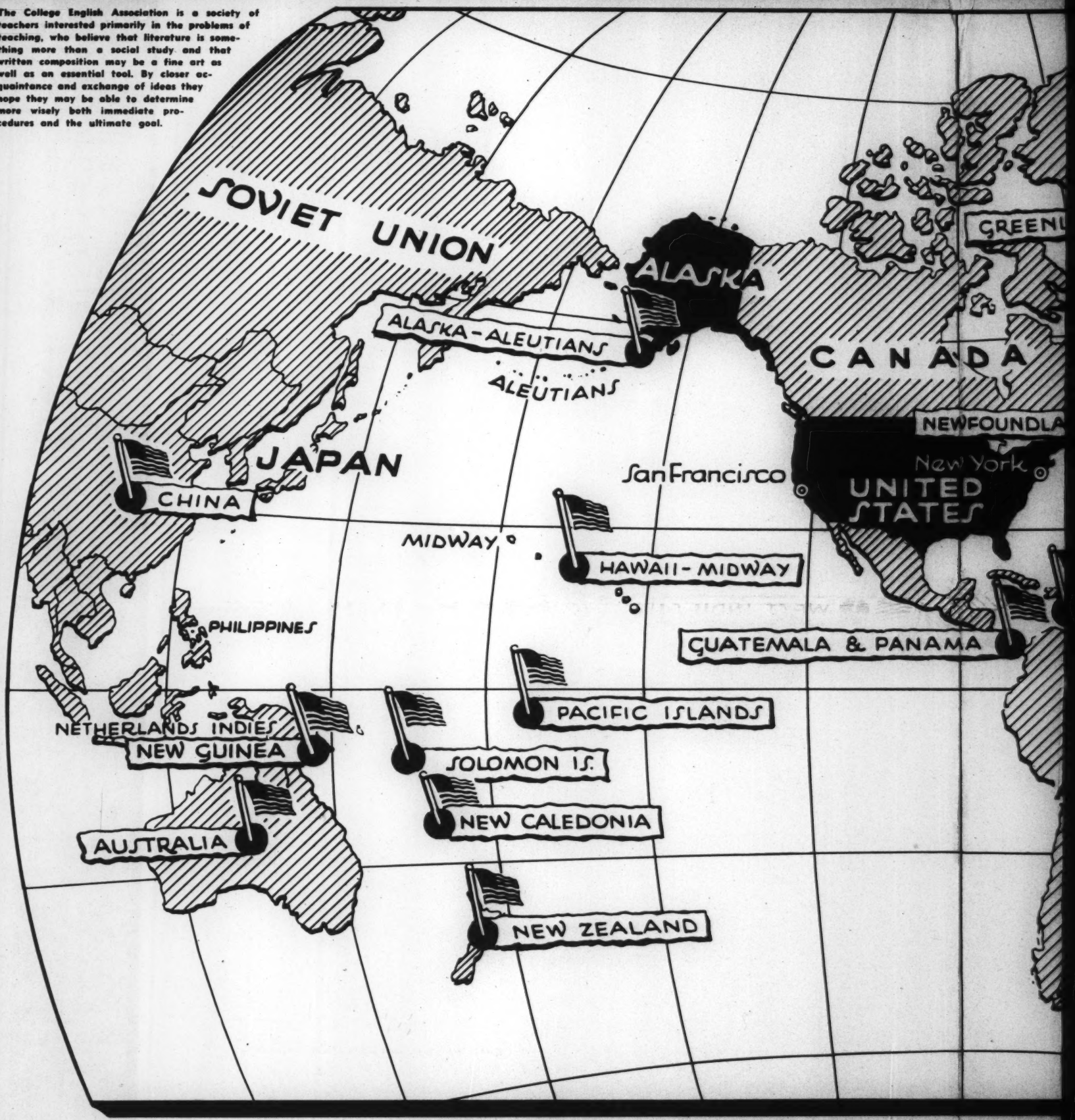
The College English Association is a society of teachers interested primarily in the problems of teaching, who believe that literature is something more than a social study and that written composition may be a fine art as well as an essential tool. By closer acquaintance and exchange of ideas they hope they may be able to determine more wisely both immediate procedures and the ultimate goal.



THAT WIDER CLASSROOM TO WHICH

Supplement to the C.E.A. NEWSLETTER—Volume V
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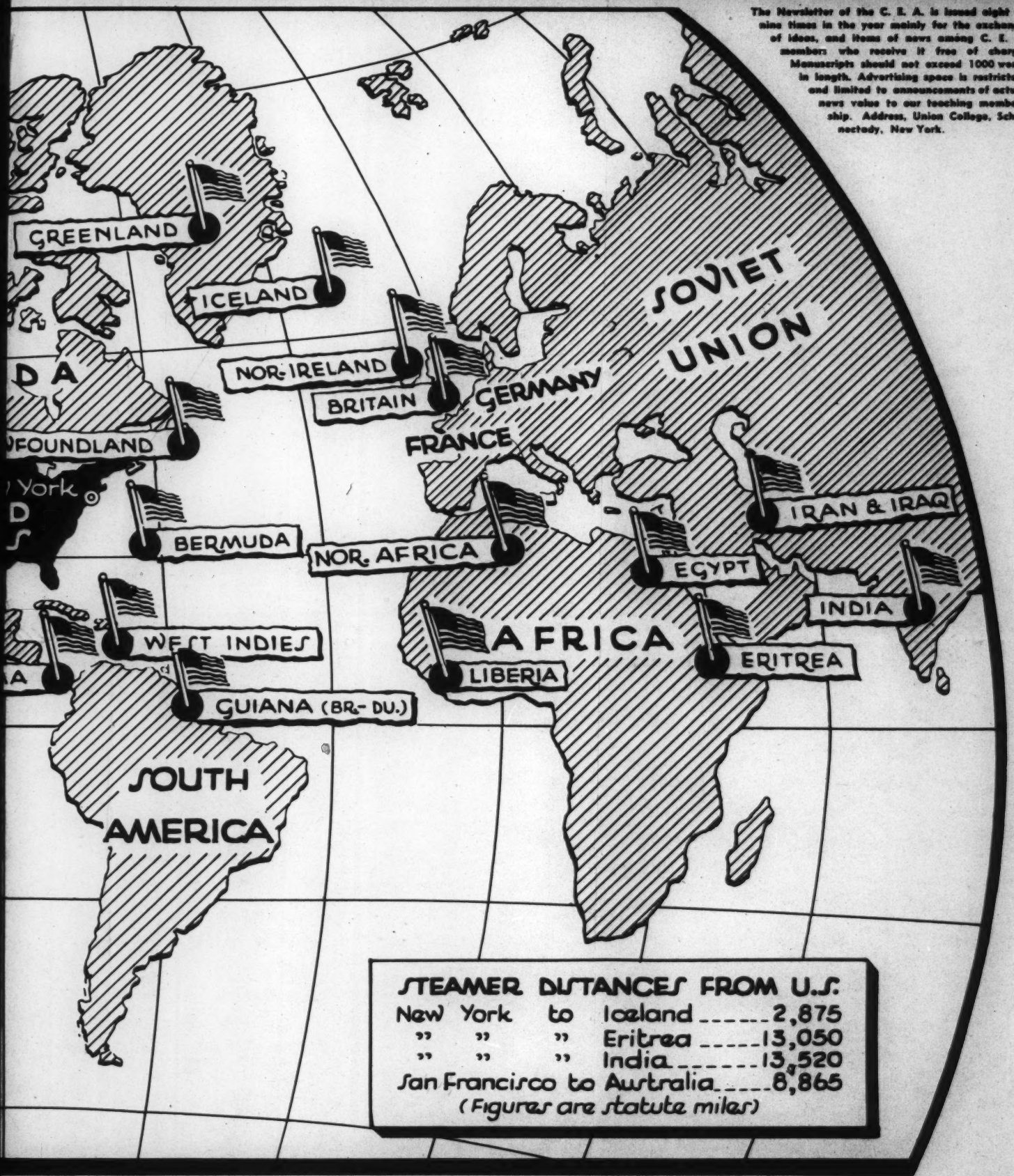

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